

ESSAYS
ON THE
EVIDENCES
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

BY WILLIAM MOSELEY.

A Christian is the highest style of Man.
DR. YOUNG.

BUCKBY:
PRINTED BY T. SMITH.

1797.

INTRODUCTION



IGNOR
but in t
greater
uninform
spread
while c
name a
of the g
ceive th
on the c
ver thou
which c
consider
their ne
ignorant
loquaci
If th
he belie
culous
weakly
great m
raised,
now t

INTRODUCTION.

IGNORANCE has ever been unfriendly to piety, but in the present day it exposes its subjects to greater danger than in any former period. Every uninformed professor is now in danger from the spread of deism : such professors are numerous, while comparatively few who bear the Christian name are able to give a just and rational account of the ground of their belief. Accustomed to receive the scriptures of the old and new testament on the credit of their forefathers, they have never thought it necessary to examine the evidences which entitle them to credit. This ill-judged confidence has been the cause of their neglect, their neglect has left them in ignorance, and their ignorance renders them an easy prey to every loquacious sceptic, or arrogant infidel.

If the uninformed professor be asked Why he believes with so much confidence, the miraculous stories contained in the Bible ? he either weakly answers Because my father did, and a great many more ; or he feels himself embarrassed, blushes, and is silent. His adversary now triumphs, laughs at him for believing

such strange things without better evidence than the credulity of his friends, and the ignorance of the multitude. The joint efforts of insolence and banter have distressed the minds of many who have not been moved from the hope of the gospel, but others have been conquered by the same weapons, and become deists.

If professors in general were acquainted with the evidences of Christianity, we should have nothing to fear from the learned sophisms of Hume, or the bold insolence of Paine; but while they are ignorant of the unanswerable proofs of the divine origin of the Scriptures, they will remain in danger from their assaults.

To remedy this evil I have now taken up my pen: how far I shall succeed, will intirely depend on the Divine blessing. As I write for the information of those who are unacquainted with the evidences of Christianity, I shall make choice of the most simple method I can command; I shall answer two questions which are frequently put by Infidels, first, What evidence is there that near eighteen hundred years ago such a person as Christ did actually live? secondly, What evidence is there that the Christian religion is of God?



ESSAY I.

ON THE

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.



LEAVING every unimportant dispute, every thing of inferior consideration, I first proceed to prove by historical evidence that the person called in the new testament Jesus Christ did actually appear about the beginning of the Christian *Æra*. To prove this, let it be observed,

First, As it is notorious that Christianity does now exist, it is evident it must have had a founder, and who was the founder, except Jesus Christ? The existence of every religious sect or party owes its origin to some man, or set of men. Mahometanism exists, its existence proves it had a beginning, its beginning supposes a founder, and who was the founder, except Mahomet? History countenances this mode of reasoning, and in this particular case, and many more, confirms the conclusion. If we apply the same mode of reasoning to Christianity, who can reasonably object to it? Christianity exists, its ex-

B

istence

istence proves it had a beginning, its beginning supposes an author, and who was this author, except Christ? Deny that Mahomet ever existed, and how will you account for Mahometanism? Deny that Christ ever existed, and how will you account for Christianity? Neither sacred, or profane history gives any other account of its origin. If therefore, we deny actual existence to Christ, we are left without any possible means of giving a reasonable account of the first origin of the Christian Religion. The very existence therefore of Christianity proves that such a person as Christ has actually existed.

Secondly, We have not barely the same evidence, but stronger, that Christ did exist, than we have of the real existence of any ancient heathen author. What evidence have we that Homer, Socrates, Virgil, Cæsar, or Plutarch, had real existence? We never saw Homer, Virgil, Socrates, or Cæsar, we never saw them, nor any man that ever did: yet we do not dispute but these men had existence: we have no doubt upon the subject. We believe these men lived, because we have writings bearing their names, because their works bear evident

gent marks of antiquity, and writers of credit in different ages have mentioned them, and attributed to them the works now generally acknowledged to be theirs. If from such evidence we believe their existence, why not from the same evidence believe with equal confidence, the existence of Christ. We have his birth, life, and death recorded, not by himself, it is true, but in a less exceptionable way: by those who were intimately acquainted with him. His name and works have been mentioned by authors of the first credit, not only among Christians, but among Heathens and Jews. For the space of seventeen hundred years, testimonies have been accumulating, and now where one testimony can be produced to prove the real existence of Homer, or Virgil, or Cæsar, we can produce five hundred to prove the real existence of Christ. Thousands have died to confirm this, while not a solitary instance of suffering and death can be produced to establish the real existence of Homer or Virgil, or any other ancient author. If the existence of Christ, therefore, is to be denied, the existence of Socrates, Virgil, and the whole group of an-

cient authors, must be much more denied, for we have evidences of a superior kind, and greater number, in favour of the former, than the latter.

Thirdly, We have the testimony both of Heathens and Jews in support of this fact. The existence of many Christian writers in the first, second, and third century, is generally allowed. From their testimony I might avail myself of proofs of the real existence of Christ, but leaving these witnesses, I pass to the testimony of his enemies. Among these we shall find sufficient for our purpose. ‘ Josephus, who wrote his ‘ history of the Jews about sixty years after the ‘ commencement of Christianity, in a passage ‘ generally admitted as genuine, makes mention ‘ of John, under the name of John the Baptist, ‘ that he was a preacher of virtue, that he baptized his proselytes, that he was well received ‘ by the people, that he was imprisoned and put ‘ to death by Herod, and that Herod lived in a ‘ criminal cohabitation with his brother’s wife. ‘ In another passage, allowed by many, although ‘ not without considerable question being moved ‘ about it, we hear of “ James, the brother of
him

"him who was called Jesus," and of his being
 "put to death. In a third passage, found extant
 "in every copy that remains of Josephus's histo-
 "ry, but the authenticity of which, has never-
 "theless been long disputed, we have an expli-
 "cit testimony of the substance of our history in
 "these words, "At that time lived Jesus, a wise
 "man, if he may be called a man, for he per-
 "formed many wonderful works: he was a teach-
 "er of such men who received the truth with
 "pleasure, he drew over to him many Jews and
 "Gentiles, this was the Christ, and when Pilate
 "at the instigation of the chief men among us
 "had condemned him to the cross, they, who
 "before had conceived an affection for him, did
 "not cease to adhere to him: for on the third
 "day he appeared to them alive again, the di-
 "vine prophets having foretold these, and ma-
 "ny wonderful things concerning him: and the
 "sect of the Christians, so called from him,
 "subsists to this time." * I shall not enter in-
 to any dispute about the genuineness of this
 C passage,

* *Paley's Evid. of Christ. Vol. I. p. 118—120.*
edit. 75.

passage, but only observe, it is but natural to expect Josephus to take some notice of a sect he must necessarily be acquainted with. The point is proved if but the last clause be allowed genuine; and for what reason should it be given up? If no copy without it can be produced, what should induce us to resign its authority?

But we do not rest the whole of our evidence on the Jewish historian: we have indisputable proof in heathen authors. The writings of Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius, furnish us with many to the point. The younger Pliny, however polished and improved, pronounced this horrid judgment, "Those who persisted in declaring themselves Christians, I ordered to be led away to punishment. (i. e. to execution) for I did not doubt, whatever it was that they confessed, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished." Trajan the Emperor, and Pliny's Master, though mild, did not exercise much moderation towards the Christians. This appears by the following advice, "The Christians are not to be sought for, but if any are brought before you, and convicted, they are to be punished." Tacitus, a well-known historian,
who

who wrote about seventy years after Christ's death, speaking of the fire * which happened at Rome in the reign of Nero, and of the suspicions entertained of the Emperor being himself concerned in it, proceeds thus, "But neither their exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the impious imputation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore, to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments, upon a set of people who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and were called by the vulgar, Christians. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate."

Suetonius, a writer cotemporary with Tacitus, describing the transactions of the same reign, uses these words, "Affecti suppliciiis Christiani genus hominum superstitionis novæ et maliciæ." † The Christians, a race of men

C2

* *This fire happened about 30 years after the death of Christ.*

† *Suet. Nero. cap. 16.*

of a new and dangerous superstition, were punished.

From the writings of these heathen authors, enemies to Christ and his cause, whose credit as faithful historians has never been disputed, we have the most incontestible evidence that the very same person called by new testament writers Jesus Christ, did actually live, and was put to death, near eighteen hundred years ago.

These testimonies are sufficient to convince ten thousand infidels, if open to conviction; but to give a farther display of the strength of testimony in our favour, I shall transcribe a few passages from Addison. ‘ That our Saviour had
‘ been in Egypt, this Celsus * though he raises
‘ a monstrous story upon it, is so far from deny-
‘ ing, that he tells us our Saviour learned the
‘ arts of magic in that country. That Pontius
‘ Pilate was governor of Judea, that our Savi-
‘ our was brought in judgment before him, and
‘ by him condemned and crucified, this is re-
corded

** Celsus was a deist, and lived in the beginning of the second century.*

‘corded by Tacitus. That our Saviour foretold
 ‘several things which came to pass according to
 ‘his predictions, this was attested by Phlegon
 ‘in his annals, as we are assured by the learned
 ‘Origen against Celsus.’ † I might easily
 multiply testimonies, but I forbear, the point is
 proved, and nothing but the greatest ignorance
 or blindest obstinacy can resist the conviction
 these evidences carry with them. And

Fourthly, It adds no small weight to the
 above arguments, that some ancient and mo-
 dern deists, unable to deny the truth of the above
 testimonies, have acknowledged, Christ did ac-
 tually exist. Among the ancient deists, Celsus,
 of the second century, Porphyry, of the third,
 and the emperor Julian of the fourth, acknow-
 ledged the real existence of Christ.

‘Porphyry and Julian confessed “ That ma-
 “ny miraculous cures, and works out of the or-
 “dinary course of nature were wrought by him.”
 ‘and Celsus was so far from calling in question
 ‘his existence, that publicly, he hardly presu-
 ‘med to deny his miracles.’ †

D

Like

† *Addison's Evidences*. p. 35, 36.

Like the ancient deists, many among the moderns, have been overcome by the strength of evidence. Hume, with all his sophistry, and Paine, with all his insolence, dare not presume on this ground. The fact is too well established to permit them to call it in question. Happy would these gentlemen be, if they could prove, or even offer the very shadow of a proof, that Christ never did appear: but finding this impossible, resolute in their desperate cause, they employ all their force in endeavouring to invalidate the credit of those things recorded of him.



V
ence
will
Chr
C
Pri
The
the
phil
ister
Bibl
to it
have
supp
tiani
by w

ESSAY II.
ON THE
COLLATERAL EVIDENCE.

WE have already seen that even deists are obliged to acknowledge the real existence of Jesus Christ. This being allowed, it will be attended with little difficulty to prove Christianity a Divine dispensation.

Objections have been raised by Berkley and Priestly, to the existence of matter and spirit. The former has asserted that man is all spirit, the latter that he is all matter. If men of such philosophical minds raise objections to the existence of body and soul, is it any proof that the Bible is a fable, because some raise objections to it? We might as reasonably admit that we have neither flesh nor blood, because Berkley supposes we are all spirit; as conclude Christianity is not from God, because it is opposed by wicked and designing men. If by a few plain

arguments then, we make it appear that Christianity is of God, every objection may be considered light as vanity, and empty as the air.

To establish this point, let us review The Character of Christ: The system of morality he taught: The miracles he wrought: The prophecies he delivered: The character of his Apostles: The rapid spread of the gospel: The effects it produces on believers: and, The support it affords the mind in the most trying seasons.

I. The Character of Christ, is a proof that Christianity is of God. Jesus Christ was either one of the basest of men, or what he pretended to be: a deceiver is the worst of characters, and unless he were the Messiah, and the Son of God, he was a deceiver: but that he was not a deceiver, Mr. Paine himself confesses: he acknowledges that Christ was a good and amiable man. This concession is all that is necessary to prove his mission Divine. Did he, or did he not assert "I proceeded forth, and came from God?" *John* viii. 42. Did he, or did he not claim the relationship of "The only begotten Son of God?" *John* iii. 16, 17. and

the

the character of the Messiah foretold by Moses and the prophets. *John* iv. 25, 26. If he declared the first, claimed the second, and affirmed the last, he either did it justly, that is, he was what he professed; or unjustly, that is, he was a liar. One of these conclusions must be drawn, we can draw no other. If he pretended to be what he was not, how could he be 'a good man?' Is a liar a good man? Is an hypocrite a good man? They may, in Mr. Paine's view, but not in mine. But if Christ were what he professed to be, then his character stands fair, he was 'a good man.' But how can Mr. P. or any other person prove Christ a good man, unless they believe he was the Son of God, and the Messiah? he certainly was worse than that infamous character, Mahomet, unless his pretensions were just. Does a good man spend his time in telling the most awful falsehoods? does a good man use every effort to deceive his fellows? can we suppose Christ was a good man, if he pursued this course? This is not the only inconsistency in Mr. Paine's writings! The goodness of character, therefore, allowed to Christ, proves him to be what he professed he

E

was:

was: and the concession of Mr. Paine, in the view of every thinking man, confutes all his own arguments, and answers all his own objections.

II. The system of morality he taught, is a further confirmation that Christianity is of God. That every virtue is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Christian Religion than by any other system, has never been disputed, even by its greatest foes. How did it come to pass that the son of a poor carpenter, and his illiterate colleagues, should be able to produce a more refined morality than all the authors of Greece and Rome? A morality so exalted as that taught in the new testament, could never be the production of a poor illiterate man.

If all the Philosophers of Greece and Rome were unable to produce such a system, notwithstanding they studied and wrote years for it: how is it reasonable to suppose that the son of a poor carpenter should be equal to the task? Surely none can seriously think that what escaped the penetration of Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero, could be discovered by the son of Joseph,

seph, without supernatural aid." When therefore, I consider the parentage, the temporal circumstances, and situation of the author of Christianity in Judea, with his few or no advantages for improvement, and the character of his colleagues; and examine the sublime doctrines they taught, and the fine morality they propagated: I say, when I consider these things, I am forced, for I cannot account for it in any other way, I am forced to believe them to be under supernatural influence. If therefore, there were no other evidence of the truth of Christianity but its refined and exalted morality, so far above the reach of mortals, I should say, "Its morality is an incontestible proof that it is of God."

III. The miracles he wrought, are proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity. That Christ did work the miracles ascribed to him, was not denied by the ancient deists. It has been shewn already, that Celsus, a famous deist of the second century, could not deny them. How happy would he have been, had it been in his power? but it was not. If a learned and crafty Philosopher so long ago could not detect

any falshood in the testimony given of the miracles, how can any, without the charge of rashness, presume now to call them in question? To the name of Celsus, I add that of the famous Tacitus the historian: he says, "That many miraculous cures, and works out of the ordinary course of nature were wrought by him." This was also confessed by Julian the apostate, Porphyry, and Hierocles: all of them not only Pagans, but professed enemies and persecutors of Christianity. From their testimonies it is proved that Christ worked miracles. What his bitterest enemies confessed, cannot be called in question. Could these miracles be wrought without supernatural power? can any man now by a word restore sight to the blind, health to the sick, and life to the dead? Is it reasonable to suppose that God would assist Christ to work miracles, if he were an impostor? would he countenance a lie? It naturally follows then, that he who wrought the miracles recorded in the new testament must have been assisted by God, and as they were wrought to prove the truth of the Christian Religion, Christianity must be divine.

IV. The

IV. The prophecies he delivered, are further proofs of the same point. The fulfilment of prophecy, was a powerful argument on the minds of Jews and Pagans in the first ages of Christianity.

The predictions of Christ were not a few, most of them relating to things the most unlikely to come to pass. But for the sake of brevity, we must confine ourselves to one of these. — “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, (Jerusalem) and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ; but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another ; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” *Luke xix. 41—44.*

This passage is a direct and explicit prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. The same event is frequently referred to by Christ in his

F

different

different discourses. * The agreement between the predictions of the destruction of this famous city, and the circumstances of the event, that is, the ruin of the Jewish nation, and capture of Jerusalem, under the Roman emperor Vespasian, thirty six years after Christ's death, is most evident. The history of this event is handed down by Josephus : his testimony, who was an eye-witness, and whose national prejudices must strongly bias his mind against Christianity, cannot be disputed : and yet his testimony of the event accords so exactly with the prediction, that he appears to have been raised up by Divine providence to bear witness without design, to the truth of Christianity, by plainly proving that the prophecies of Christ were fulfilled.

It may be questioned whether these prophecies were really delivered before the event. That they were, will appear clearly if you consider the following particulars.

1. The judgment of antiquity, though varying in the precise year of the publication of the gospels,

* *Matt.* xxi. 33—46. xxii. 1—17.

Mark xii. 1—12. *Luke* xiii. 1—9. xx. 9—20.

gospels, concurs in assigning them a date prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.*

2. This judgment is confirmed by a strong probability arising from the course of human life. The destruction of Jerusalem took place in the seventieth year after the birth of Christ, the three Evangelists, one of whom was his immediate companion, and the other two associated with his companions, were, it is probable, not much younger than he was, they must consequently have been far advanced in life when Jerusalem was taken, and no reason has been given why they should defer writing their histories so long.

3. If the Evangelists at the time of writing the gospels, had known of the destruction of Jerusalem, by which catastrophe the prophecies were plainly fulfilled, it is most probable that in recording the predictions, they would have dropped some word or other about the completion, in like manner as Luke after relating the denunciation of a dearth by Agabus, adds,

F2

“ which

* *Lardner. Vol. xiii.*

"which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar." † *Acts* xi. 26.

4. The admonitions which Christ gave to his followers * to save themselves by flight, are not easily accounted for on the supposition of the prophecy being fabricated after the event.

5. I think that if the prophecies had been composed after the event, there would have been more specification: the names or descriptions of the enemies, the general, the emperor would have been found in them. The designation of the time would have been more determinate. ‡

These considerations, to an unprejudiced mind are conclusive; they prove satisfactorily that these prophecies were delivered prior to the events. If Christ, five and thirty years before the event, predicted the destruction of the city, and the way and manner in which it was to be destroyed, and the whole came to pass exactly as he had foretold, was he not possessed of a pro-

† *Le Clerc. Diff. III. de Quat. Ev. Num. vii. p. 541.*

* *Luke* xxi. 20, 21. *Matt.* xiv. 18.

‡ *Paley. vol. ii. p. 17—22.*

a prophetic spirit? and if possessed of a prophetic spirit, was he not under the influence of a Divine spirit? was he not what he professed to be, and is not Christianity of God?

V. The character of the writers of the new testament, is an indisputable evidence of the truth of their cause. All the writers of the new testament unite in bearing witness to Christ's birth, miracles, death, resurrection, and the divinity of his mission. Living and conversing with him, as some of them did, it was impossible they should be deceived, especially for so long a space as three years. They must know whether in the discharge of their ministry, they bore witness to the truth or to a lie: if any imposition was attempted, it was impossible but they must have been acquainted with it. On the ground therefore, of the new testament writers being in circumstances that enabled them to determine with certainty whether the miracles and mission of Christ were all a fraud and imposition, I argue upon their characters thus, They were either faithful witnesses, and so honest men, or false witnesses, and so deceivers: or in other words, they were either good men,

or bad men? Is it reasonable to suppose they were bad men? Is it usual with bad men to condemn all vice? to recommend nothing but holiness and piety? to represent immoral men as children of the devil? to declare that all who live and die strangers to a knowledge of God, and strict obedience to his will, will have their part in everlasting flames? and that none but faithful, honest, holy men are approved by God here, or will be blest by him hereafter? Is this I say, like the conduct of wicked men? has nature so far changed her operations, that bad trees bring forth good fruit? And to this add, if they had been false witnesses, or not firmly persuaded in their own minds of the truth of what they propagated, is it reasonable to suppose they would have suffered shame, poverty, persecution, and death itself, in all its most horrid forms of torture? would they not ten thousand times over rather have given up their cause, if they knew it to be false, than have suffered the loss of their goods, imprisonment, and death? surely none can seriously think that these men knew the whole was an imposture. And if they were not witnesses to a lie, but honest and faithful witnesses

witnesses to the truth, their characters are fair, and we pronounce them moral men : and if they were honest moral men, had Christ been an impostor, would they have represented him as the most perfect pattern of virtue and piety, the world had ever seen ; yea a spotless character, a man in whom there was no guile ? Besides, is it reasonable, if they were good men, that they should have been so industrious to deceive the people, persuading them not only that he was the Messiah, but that they must rely upon him for the salvation of their souls ? We cannot suppose they could act this part if they were good men, (which it appears they were) but are constrained to believe that their testimony was true, the cause in which they laboured divine, and the religion for which they died, the offspring of God.

VI. The rapid spread of the gospel, forms another argument strongly in favour of the truth of Christianity. The Acts of the Apostles afford us a view of the progress it made during their lives. The account there given is confirmed by Tacitus, Pliny, and others.

Tacitus speaking of the Christians in connection

nection with what we have already related, of the fire at Rome, says, " They had their denomination from Christus. That the pernicious superstition, though checked for a while, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, but reached the city (Rome) also. At first they were only apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect, afterwards, a vast multitude were discovered by them."

Pliny says, " For many of all ages and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused: nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but lesser towns also, and the open country."

" There was not a nation, either greek, barbarian, or of any other name, even of them who wander in tribes, and live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings were not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe by the name of the crucified Jesus." To this declaration of Justin Martyr, I add what Tertulian says, " We have filled your cities, islands, towns, and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum."

It needs no further proof that within a few
years

years after the ascension of Christ, the gospel was preached in most principal places of the known world; and that in little more than three hundred years it became the established religion through the vast Roman empire: *but, since, too*

“In these several stages the history is without a parallel. To establish a new religion amongst a few people, or in one single nation, is a thing in itself exceedingly difficult: to introduce a new faith, a new way of thinking and acting, and to persuade many nations to quit the religion in which their ancestors had lived and died, which had been delivered down to them from time immemorial, to make them forsake and despise the deities that they had been accustomed to reverence and worship: this is a work of still greater difficulty. The resistance of education, worldly policy, and superstition, is almost invincible.” †

If men now become Christians in consequence of parental influence, or the power of fashion, it was not so formerly: men and women became Christians in opposition to deep-

H

rooted

† *Jortin's dis. on the Christ. rel. p. 107. ed. iv.*

rooted prejudices, shame, persecution, and death. Surely the millions that became converts to Christianity at so dear a rate, were well satisfied that it was no imposture.

“The propagation of this religion was no less extraordinary than the religion itself, nor less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above all human understanding. It is well known that in the course of a very few years, it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe: and this by the ministry of an inconsiderable number of the most inconsiderable persons: that at this time paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronized by the great: that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles, on the most important occasions: whether these were the tricks of the priest, or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted or overcome: the fact is certain, that on the preaching of a few fishermen their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the

rest;

rest : and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission, and to convince us that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own." *

VII. The power and efficacy which attend the promulgation of Christianity forms another argument in favour of its divine origin. The design of Christianity is infinitely more exalted than the design of any other religious institution. The design of Christianity is to reform Man, not partially, but wholly : not a particular spot, but the whole world. Its design is to correct the erroneous, to destroy prejudices, to rule and direct the affections of the heart, to instruct the mind in the true knowledge and worship of God, to form mortals for the society of Angels, and at length to conduct them safe to that haven where storms never rise, where unmolested safety ever dwells. How worthy of God is this design ! Nor is it less noble in its effects. We have seen the profligate Magdalen, and that virulent persecutor, Saul, reformed by its divine energy. We have heard of thousands

H2

whose

* *Seame Jenyns. p. 101, 102.*

whose hearts were cold and carnal, being warmed with a rational piety : of others whose understandings were blinded, being enlightened : of others whose passions were turbulent and licentious, becoming meek and holy : and of others whose lives have been the most base, becoming the best of fathers, masters, wives, servants, and children. This is not an uncommon case, it is common through Christendom : most Christian societies of every name have some who have felt these salutary and divine effects. It was the boast of the Apostles that the gospel was the power of God to salvation to every one that believed, and it has been the glory of the Christian Church ever since, that thousands are reformed within her pale, while under the influence of every other religious system they grow worse.

To the man who is the subject of these effects, it is the most powerful and convincing argument that can be produced in favour of Christianity. " Surely, " says he (and what man will not say it with him) " that which has purified my heart, enlightened my mind, powerfully drawn me to duty, and led me to the
practise

practise of holiness, must come from God."

On the whole, none can dispute but good has been done, wherever Christianity has been cordially received. It is quite unreasonable to suppose that any evil power was the author of this good. It is no less evident that no system of religion merely human, and unaided by superior influence, could produce all those wonderful effects which have attended Christianity. Who then but God interposed in this case? To whom but to him are we to attribute the good that in this way has been done? Has he in this instance resigned his prerogative to another, and ceased to be the author of good? or did he maintain this right while he blessed a lie, and countenanced evil that good might come.

VIII. The support Christianity affords the mind in the most distressing seasons, is another incontestible proof of its being divine.

As we are appointed to death by the great disposer of all, it is but natural to expect he should make some provision for the support of their minds in the hour of dissolution, who love and fear him. Laying this down as a principle, which to me appears very reasonable, we may

infer, if Christianity affords greater support to the mind in this trying moment than any other system, it is a strong evidence that Christianity is the provision which God hath made.

Where is the man whose imagination is alive, whose powers are not impaired, or is not awfully hardened in sin, that can die happy, without the supports and comforts exhibited in the gospel? I have heard of heroes dying, but of none dying happy: I have heard of profligate sinners dying, but of none dying happy: I have heard of deists dying, but of none dying happy: But on the contrary, I have heard of hundreds of serious Christians dying in the most happy frame of mind you can conceive of. How many have triumphed with the great Apostle of the gentiles, in the face of the king of terrors? "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How many, in prisons, on the rack, and in the flames, have rejoiced, and sung praises to God? Supported by the energy of the same gospel they preached, Paul and Silas were happy, yea, rejoiced in the stocks. Thousands since
their

their day, under the pains of banishment, persecution, torture and death, have found the glorious gospel of the blessed God sufficient to support their minds, rejoice their hearts, and fortify their souls, in view of death. This has not been the experience of a few : every age and every nation where the gospel has been received, has been witness to such dignified submission and rational fortitude.

Where shall we find equal support in similar circumstances ? where shall we find comfort or support when we lie gasping upon our dying pillow, if we give up Christianity ? Where shall we find a religion so suitable to sinners, and so worthy of God, if we resign this divine inheritance ? Deists themselves who in health scoffed at the religion of Jesus, when surrounded by the terrors of death have been glad to embrace it. We never heard of a believer in Christianity turning deist in sickness or death : but we have heard of many deists convinced of their error, becoming Christians on a sick bed, and in the near approach of dissolution.

Deism affords no comfort to the mind under the various troubles of life, and in dissolution,

the most trying season of all, it cruelly abandons the soul to wretchedness and despair. Hence it is that many deists terminate their lives by their own hands: unable to bear reflection, the afflictions of old age, or a lingering death, they hasten themselves into that ruin their guilty consciences imagine to be their certain doom. If men live deists, they seldom die deists. If men live unimpressed with the importance of religion, they don't die without feeling its necessity!

C O N C L U S I O N.

“IF I have here demonstrated the divine origin of the Christian religion by any argument which cannot be confuted; no others, however plausible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever disprove it: because if it is once shewn to be true, it cannot be false.

But here I must observe, that the most unsurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle

cle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we often-er disbelieve for want of inclination, than for want of evidence. The first step towards thinking this revelation true, is our hope that it is so: for whenever we much wish any proposition to be true, we are not far from believing it.

It is certainly for the interest of all good men that its authority should be well-founded; and still more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better: because it is the only system either of reason or religion, which can give them any assurance of pardon.

The punishment of vice is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation: repentance can be no compensation; it may change a wicked man's dispositions, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one by profligacy and extravagance contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiser, and hinder him from running into further distresses, but can never pay off his old bonds: for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are dis-

K

charged

charged by himself, or some other in his stead; this very discharge Christianity alone holds forth to the penitent believer, and if true, will certainly perform. The truth of it therefore, must ardently be wished for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent or reform.

It is well worth every man's while who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Christianity if he can; because he will find it the surest preservation against all vicious habits, and their attendant evils; the best resource under distresses and disappointments, ill health, and ill fortune; and the firmest basis on which contemplation can rest; and without some, the human mind is never perfectly at ease. But if any one is attached to a favorite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits, incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, or persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction, and therefore must commence unbeliever in his own defence." *

"But

* *Same Tenyns. p. 110, 114.*

CONCLUSION.

37

But should these credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable; from believing it what harm could ensue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly? Would it make worse parents, or children, husbands, or wives, masters, or servants, friends or neighbours? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation? It could not be criminal; It could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal; because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind; by which, if false, providence must have permitted men to deceive each other for the most beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be surely more meritorious to believe, from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with scorn, from obstinacy and self-conceit. It cannot be detrimental, because if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion;

devotion ; or can support them in the hour of distress or sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of Pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing : for that light which once lighted the gentiles, is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the gospel : we can now form no rational system of deism but what must be borrowed from that source, and as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same ; and therefore if we will not accept of Christianity, we can have no religion at all." †

† *S. Jenyns. p. 107—109.*



